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SUBJECT: GOZ CRACKS DOWN ON CHRISTIAN ALLIANCE

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

¶1. (SBU) On January 26, eight pastors of the Christian Alliance (CA) were arrested after a lunch meeting in Kadoma, a medium-sized town roughly 100 kilometers southwest of Harare. According to Ray Motsi, one of the CA leaders, the lunch was the sixth in a series throughout Zimbabwe to publicize CA and explain its goals and objectives. Present were 12 CA leaders and 29 pastors and their wives from the area.

¶2. (C) According to Motsi, about 15 heavily armed police (automatic weapons and grenades) interrupted the meeting and "invited" the pastors to the central police station for questioning. Motsi said he and the others drove themselves. At the station, CIO officials began questioning them and claimed the CA was involved in non-church-related activities. Later in the afternoon, a lawyer whom the pastors had managed to contact by cell phone arrived. Motsi said at that point the CIO operatives had indicated they would release the pastors and allow them to appear in court pursuant to a summons. However, after the lawyer left, the CIO decided not to release the pastors after all but to arrest them.

¶3. (C) Motsi stated that he and the other pastors were individually questioned by the CIO Friday night, Saturday night, and part of Sunday about the CA, its efforts to organize, and its activities. The interrogations continued on Monday until a CA lawyer arrived and demanded to see his clients. Police then took the pastors to court where they were charged under Section 37 of the Criminal Law Act, which makes it a crime to participate in a gathering with intent to promote public violence or a breach of the peace. The pastors were released on bail and ordered to appear in court on March 5.

15. (C) Motsi told polecon chief that he and the other CA members were not mistreated during their detention. In fact, the police at the jail had been supportive of the pastors and commended them for taking on the government. Motsi added that after his release one of his CIO interrogators engaged him and also praised CA activities. He told Motsi he wanted to quit the CIO but couldn't and added that his supervisors had compelled his actions. Finally, he told Motsi he knew the charges would not stick.

16. (C) Motsi termed his arrest a "good experience." It was his first time behind bars, he said, and he now knows what many people in the country go through. He added that the incident had also served to publicize the CA and its activities.

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16. (C) The CIO actions are another example of the GOZ's increasing efforts to stifle any opposition to the regime, however peaceful. As Motsi aptly observed, the arrests will likely be counter-productive for the regime, not only by drawing attention to the CA, but also by confirming the government's increasing paranoia about internal opposition ) the surest sign that it is weakening. Motsi's conversation with the CIO operative is also further evidence that while many military and police personnel are deserting or quitting, even those that remain are no longer necessarily regime loyalists.  
DELL